



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).



"THE FLAX SPINNERS IN LAREN"  
By Max Liebermann

—National Gallery, Berlin

## Max Liebermann—Pathfinder of German Secessionists

By ANNA LOUISE WANGEMAN

IN the galaxy of prominent men which the German metropolis shelters within its walls, the great leader of modern German art, Max Liebermann, shines like a star of the first magnitude.

Here, within the very shadow of the Brandenburger Tor, he spent his youthful days, and returned, after many years' absence, to live in the famous old house on the Pariser Platz, where his parents had once held sway as prominent members of the business world.

Born in Berlin in 1847, the son of a wealthy manufacturer, Max Liebermann received all the benefits of a good education. He spent a very happy childhood in a home pretentious for those days, and old Berlin residents still recall the children's

parties at the Liebermann house where the small boys wore black velvet suits with white lace collars!

At the age of twenty-one, Max Liebermann was matriculated at the University of Berlin as a student of philosophy—not from choice, to be sure, but because by so doing he avoided serious differences with his father.

Meanwhile, instead of burning midnight oil in the study of the old philosophers, young Liebermann secretly visited the studio of Karl Steffek, the popular soldier and horse painter, where he took a course in drawing and painting. His master was so much pleased with the young man's progress that at the end of a year he was allowed to assist in painting a part of Stef-

feck's large canvas, "Battle of Sadowa."

However, even at this early date the young artist felt instinctively that he was not getting what he needed, and, having finally won over his father, he abandoned the university course in 1869 and was allowed to go to Weimar to study art systematically.

It was not the classic atmosphere of this little town, saturated with the Goethe spirit, that attracted the young artist, but a Belgian master, Wappers, famous for his fine coloring, with whom he wished to work.

Liebermann's strong individuality impelled him to be ever on the lookout for the thing he wanted. He likes to tell the story of the effect of a walk he took one morning outside the city gates of Weimar, where he observed laborers toiling in the fields. A sudden flash of inspiration told him that there was a beauty in their rhyth-

mic movements and that those were the people he must paint. Although he did not set to work at once, this was really the beginning of a tendency that never left him.

His first large canvas, now in the National Gallery in Berlin, "Women Plucking Geese," was done in 1873, and, while still academic in style, treated a subject hitherto unheard of in German art. It aroused so much indignation in staid artistic circles that Liebermann was promptly dubbed the "Apostle of Ugliness." However, a purchaser was finally found, and with the proceeds Liebermann went to Paris.

While there he heard that the great German artist, Menzel, had seen his much talked of canvas and had expressed a desire to meet the young artist. This was especially gratifying to Liebermann, who admired the elder man so greatly, and upon his return from Paris he set out, with



"WOMEN PLUCKING GEESSE"  
By Max Liebermann

—National Gallery, Berlin



"COBBLER'S SHOP"  
By Max Liebermann

—National Gallery, Berlin

close sympathy. But more than this, the atmospheric effects in the Netherlands particularly impressed the young artist and he reveled in the myriad effects of the intermingling of sunlight and mist and blue haze, as he observed them there.

On a visit to Italy he lingered for two months in Venice, impressed by the wonderfully warm tints of the southern sky.

There, among other Munich artists, he met the famous Lenbach, and in 1878 decided to pitch his tent in Munich. It was here that he found himself working side by

a proud heart, to call upon Menzel. The latter welcomed him with the words: "So you are the Liebermann who painted that picture? Well, you know, you ought to have your ears boxed with it. It's excellent, but a man doesn't paint that sort of thing until he's fifty!"

In Paris Liebermann met Munkacsy and followed up his manner for a short time only, for the period of his "wanderjahre" had now begun, and we find him traveling in Holland and Belgium, restlessly endeavoring to discover for himself a path in the dense forest of artistic production.

In France he was attracted and encouraged by the tense realist, Courbet, and also went to Barbizon to admire Millet, the great idealizer of labor.

On his visits to Holland he was fascinated by the wonderful works of Rembrandt and Franz Hals, and here, in 1881, he met Josef Israels, the nestor of the modern Dutch school, with whom he was in

side with men who were wrestling with the same problems he had attempted to solve—all of them preparing, though still unconsciously, for that great event in modern German art called the "secessionist movement," which, though it ripened slowly in the chilly atmosphere of pedantry, finally burst into bloom in 1813, when a group of young artists in Munich seceded from the traditions of stagnant academic art and



"WOMEN MENDING NETS"  
Etching by Max Liebermann



*"EVENING IN NORDWIJH"*  
Etching by Max Liebermann

opened an exhibition of their own in a small building near the Englischer Garten. This undertaking attracted universal attention.

The secessionists in France had been heard of a few years previous, and with them these young Germans were in close sympathy. The impressionistic movement had worked its way from France via Holland into Germany, and the so-called plein-air style was the accepted one. No more black shadows! Every painting was an attempt at solving the problem of the prismatic effects of light upon form. The merely beautiful was sacrificed for the impression of the moment; light was the conqueror, victorious over all. Details were eliminated in order to bring out the essentials. It was translating nature into a new language.

This great movement acted like a tremendous upheaval that stirred German art—sluggish as it had become—

to its very roots. Max Liebermann was the great pathfinder, and many pitched battles had to be fought with public opinion before the new style could assert itself.

This happened in Munich twenty years ago, and gradually, after the vanguards had opened successive exhibits in Dresden, Vienna and Düsseldorf, they finally stormed the German metropolis.

In 1899 they held their first picture show in Berlin, and ever since then Max Liebermann has been the arch-priest of this congregation of artists. He was president of the secessionists until very

recently; but although he resigned the chair, he is still actively interested in the society.

In 1911 the honorary Degree of Doctor Honoris Causa was conferred upon him by his alma mater, and he was further honored with the title of Professor.

The same untiring energy, which characterized his early efforts, is his today. He is a prolific worker and through his dealer



*"PEASANT SHARPENING SCYTHE"*  
Etching by Max Liebermann



THEODOR FONTANE  
Etching by Max Liebermann

and long-time friend, Paul Cassirer, disposes of a great many of his paintings.

Besides devoting himself to painting and etching, he has found time for literary work. The same keen eye that helps him to put upon the canvas every tone of the chromatic gamut of light, is evident in his pen pictures. His style is terse and unburdened with ornamental phrases.

Liebermann is the author of interesting literary contributions, such as biographical sketches of the French painter, Degas, and of Josef Israels. He has frequently written for "Kunst und Künstler," an art magazine, as well as for the daily papers, some of his most interesting articles being those written last year in reply to a complaint made about the business methods of the secessionists by Burgomaster Reicke of Berlin. Liebermann's defense of the society was brilliant.

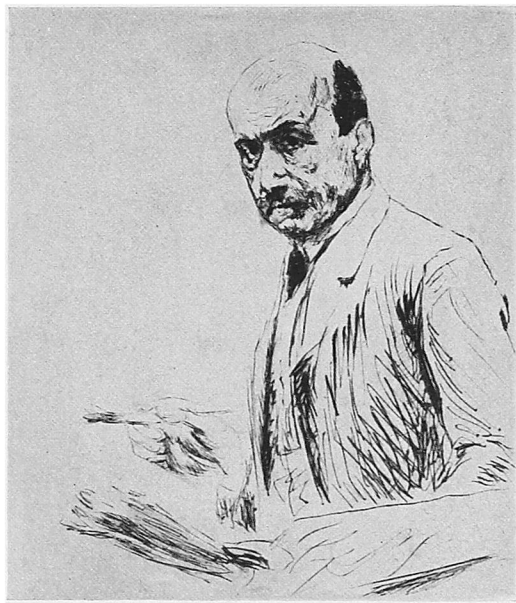
In his portrait work Liebermann employs the same directness that characterizes all of his other work. He paints his sitter as he sees him, without idealizing the features. His manner often suggests his admiration

for the style of the great Franz Hals. The Liebermann portrait of Burgomaster Petersen of Hamburg, ordered for the museum in 1890, made quite a sensation since the burgomaster's family at first refused to have it exhibited on account of its broad treatment.

Among the many famous men who have been sketched or painted by Liebermann are Gerhardt Hauptmann, Dr. Wilhelm Bode, Dr. Virchow, Dr. Friedrich Naumann, Theodor Fontane, Constantin Meunier. In each portrait the artist has struck the keynote of his sitter's character, making the likeness more intensely realistic rather than adding anything savoring of the poetic touch.

It is a curious fact that, though Herr Liebermann is a great admirer of feminine beauty, he has never painted portraits of women, excepting of those of his family.

In his luxuriously furnished home he has a priceless collection of paintings, those of the modern French school predominating. He especially favors Manet, the friend and fellow artist he has always greatly admired.



MAX LIEBERMANN  
Etched by Himself

Many brilliant social functions have taken place in the spacious studio on the top floor. The handsome Frau Liebermann and her charming daughter, Kathe, preside at these gatherings, while the artist himself is a genial host, entertaining his guests with conversations that scintillate with clever paradoxes and antitheses. As he stands, in his characteristic attitude, with his hands in his pockets, chatting—often sarcastically, to be sure—about personal experiences, or drawing upon his unlimited fund of wit in telling anecdotes, he keeps his hearers spell-bound. He is as fearless in giving his opinion as he is brilliant in characterization.

The story goes that after the pretentious, much-criticized white marble fountains and statues had been placed in the square just outside the Brandenburger Tor, by order of the kaiser, the latter, on meeting Herr Liebermann, asked him how he liked them. Whereupon the artist replied: "Your Majesty, in order to enjoy looking at them I should have to wear blue goggles!"

While the family resides in town, Herr Liebermann may be seen daily—a medium-sized figure, with a face compelling attention—taking his constitutional late in the afternoon along the Tiergartenstrasse accompanied by his pet Dacshund, Manne.

He frequently attends the theater, his favorite entertainments being the Mozart operas—this in contradiction to his own essentially modern tendency in art.

From May until October the Liebermann family occupies a charming country house on the Wannsee, and there it is that the artist takes particular delight in his garden on the lake.

During his frequent trips to the Dutch coast, especially to Nordwijk, many of his late pictures have been done. The seaside effects, with their scope of light effects, afford many themes for his brush. It is quite significant that, as the artist has grown older, his tones have become lighter and lighter and, besides working in oil, he has done many pastels that appear to be but

the merest suggestions of the various moods of nature.

The elimination of all but the absolutely necessary elements is the dominating idea in his numberless etchings. It would almost seem that at times the artist's needle expressed, with a minimum quantity of line, that virtuosity of the draughtsman that must be innate and cannot be acquired.

The types he has painted were never before thought worthy or capable of artistic treatment by German artists, and Liebermann was the first of his countrymen to paint laborers in the fields and factories, cobblers, weavers, spinners and lace makers. He neither idealizes these people, nor does he weave a romantic element into his pictures. On the contrary he seems to abstain from flights of the imagination and portrays these figures as they appear, absorbed in toil, never looking out at the beholder to solicit attention.

One of Liebermann's most popular paintings is that of the "Flax Spinners," now in the National Gallery in Berlin. The figures are composed as such to fit into the space and general scheme of the composition, as plastic foils for the play of light which the artist always uses so skillfully. A certain shade of red, now called the Liebermann red, is a characteristic note of all his fine color harmonies.

When in 1882 his canvas called the "Court of the Orphanage in Amsterdam" appeared in the salon a French critic remarked that "Herr Liebermann has stolen some of the rays from the sun and utilized them as if he were Phoebus himself!"

There is hardly a modern gallery in Germany which does not possess a Liebermann canvas, many of his best pictures having been bought in Hamburg.

He has frequently exhibited in Paris and as early as 1881 he won the medal there for his picture, "Old Men's Home in Amsterdam," this having been the first mark of distinction conferred upon a German since the Franco-Prussian war.



In this same year Liebermann painted "The Cobbler's Shop," one of the treasures of the Berlin National Gallery. When this painting was first exhibited in Paris the French critic, M. Hochede, made it famous with these words: "If you have discovered the secrets of plein-air, my dear Manet, Herr Liebermann has learned how to catch and imprison light within a room. I would gladly give up 500 square yards of all the paintings in the salon for the possession of his little picture."

With this eminent modern artist a new

era of serious thought in the conception of nature as well as in the handling of light and color has not only revolutionized old methods, but from the very fact of its having emanated from a strong mentality, has infused fresh life into German art. His untiring energy, his keen eye combined with a thoroughly artistic temperament, have stamped Max Liebermann as one of the greatest empirics of the century.

[Miss Anna Louise Wangeman, a native of Chicago, has spent the past six years abroad, devoting the greater part of her time to the study of the history of art at Berlin University.]

